534 614 701 The xylophone (bala) consists of a table made of strips of hardwood, with a gourd under each strip, like a resonator; the size of each gourd depends on the note desired. A section of the gourd is stopped by the vibrating surface which is a white material very closely woven like a cobweb. When it is played well, the bala produces various tunes, but they seem very thin compared to the noise of the drums and the shrieking of the trumpets. [316]

The accessory bells are of no particular interest.

538 701 No expedition of any consequence ever set out without a griot (dyeli) (1). The griot has acquired a deplorable reputation

1. See above, pp. et seq., on the dyeli.

because of the fact that too often he uses his fluency to exploit the rich and powerful. This should not hide the fact, however, that the griot has often played a role not lacking in grandeur. In addition to being the official archivist of one or more families, he was also, in the native sense, a kind of epic bard who told his [534] tales in song, accompanying himself on a stringed instrument similar to a guitar or a rudimentary harp. When told by him, the traditions, involved with those miracles so dear to the native, had something of the quality of our medieval epics. In that respect, at least, the griot truly deserved his title of dyeli (master).

Unfortunately, however, being reduced to earning his keep by making use of his information, he resorted to slander and calumny. This made him so much to be feared that in order to buy his silence the victims despoiled themselves for his benefit, as did those whom he intoxicated with base flattery.

538 701 726 In the army the griot stirred and encouraged the brave men. On the eve of an important engagement or shortly before it, a large assembly customarily was held, and roused by the epic poems of the griot no less than by the war dances and copious libations, the warriors promised under oath to perform such and such acts of great courage. It was then the duty of the griot to take public note, so to speak, of this commitment and later,

538 when the action had occurred, to celebrate the glory of its
701 author. If, however, events showed that there had been mere
726 bravado, the griot was then expected to stigmatize the braggart's cowardice -- something he never failed to do, since he found it just as profitable as to celebrate the glory of a hero.

At a critical hour when the army threatened to yield to the baser instincts engendered by rout, panic, and defeat, the griot often had the fortunate ability to arouse failing courage, sometimes [317] with cutting sarcasm, sometimes by exalting the lofty achievements of the ancestors, sometimes by setting forth in a tragic light the lot of the defeated. The chronicle shows him in this role when Ma-n-son, held in check by the stubborn resistance of Tyitya, sees himself -- final disgrace -- abandoned by his wives who have decided to return to Ségou. All through the night the griot sang battle songs, and at dawn the terrible assault proved that the army had recovered its spirit.

This handler of words was undoubtedly a formidable "master." He was said to know words that kill, since he was aware of the actions dominating every person's life. When Ma-n-son's twelve wives came in a body and told him that they had resolved to return without him to Ségou because they were all the more homesick when they felt that defeat was at hand, he ordered them to repeat their words before the griot whom he had summoned. With their action thus publicly noted, he gave them leave to depart, knowing that he would be able to avenge himself for their desertion whenever he decided to do so.

The songs of the griot, retold and repeated by the warriors and the people, gave memorable actions ineffaceable lineaments. The chronicle tells us that when the expedition against Dina was undertaken, the griot improvised the song which begins: "In the shade of the bushy kaminya tree, the hen cannot tell a grain of millet from a grain of sand." This meant that, in the confusion of battle, a warrior can make no distinctions. In fact, the country was completely laid waste during this expedition, and the booty was so abundant that forever after the griot had only to sing this song to arouse the warlike ardor of the ton'-dyon'.

538 A man of high rank is always accompanied by his griot,
814 who is both a confidant and a mere factotum. It is true, of course,

538 814 that the griot is often a wretched character, an insignificant parasite living at the expense of everyone. There are those among them, however, who carry out their duties as archivist very faithfully and who are sincerely devoted to their masters, great and generous lords in the native fashion whose interests and reputations such griot ably defend.

It is griot of this last type who transmit the reliable historical tradition from which we have borrowed the foregoing accounts. There [318] is no doubt that these griot, true "masters" (dyeli) of historical traditions, have played a considerable role in native society. Therefore their words should never be passed over lightly, although obviously they should be subjected to judicious criticism.

The To-da

614 631 In origin, evolution, and contingencies, the clan developed from the social bases already studied, community and brotherhood, of which it is, in the last analysis, only an amalgamation. As a result, its various manifestations are similar to those of these institutions, even though possessing its own peculiarities.

One of the most characteristic features of the clan is the to-da, which was the familiar term used by members of the clan for the region in which they lived. The word literally means "the pot of mush" and alludes to the essential element in the corporate [539] banquets of the fla-n-ton'. As the saying goes: "furu-ba to, to kadi, na ka ko, (at the corporate meal the mush is good and the sauce is bad.")

The to-da originally was limited to Ségou-koro and its immediate environs, i.e., the small number of villages affiliated with the ton' either voluntarily or by force. It progressively extended its sway along the Niger: first on the right bank as far as Kirango; later almost to Dina; finally it extended its influence over a broad area on both sides of the river from Kan ga-ba to Timbuktu.

This territory was organized in various ways. The key region ran along the Niger from Dina to Kirango, and the sector

212 by numbers, and notably by ten, which may be obtained, among
801 other ways and if it's a question of representing the Creator, by adding the first four numbers, or by adding the number five to
[776] itself." Ten is the numerical symbol of Faro (god of water); it symbolizes what is just, true, perfect, and complete.

The symbolism of numbers is used in divination: a first
[787] group of eight signs, called the secret count, reproduces the seven first numbers which, according to a Bambara myth, were engraved in space at the instant that the Creator by his word formed the universe. They contain the whole universe.

These numerical signs were ritually traced on the most varied occasions.

[802] Finally, we must note the existence of the sign for "nothing," fu gundo, zero, which stands at the beginning of a series of 196 numerical signs used by those who practice arithomancy.

The word Mandé, of central significance for 44 peoples, may be interpreted, according to some, as manin (the secret name for ten), number of unity and of the cultural community.

F. Writing

212 For everyday use, the Bambara have adopted arabic characters, called by them "writing of the Blacks." In fact, only those who have studied in the Marabouts' schools know how to read or write them. No written literature, properly speaking, exists. A
538 large store of traditions, epics, tales, legends, songs, and proverbs is transmitted orally from generation to [17] generation by professional storytellers, the griot. Moreover, the whole sum of sci-
867 entific, juridical, ethical, and practical knowledge is taught orally
868 in the course of daily life or during long years of initiation. Certain old masters renowned for their learning are consulted from far distances when a chief is in doubt on a point of tradition.

212 Nevertheless, signs do exist for a secret writing that the priests, the heads of families, or blacksmiths draw on the sanctuaries, on masks, furniture, clothing, cabin walls, or in the sand.

212 For the Bambara, things exist by signs. These signs have at-
812 tached themselves to things, calling them to consciousness and to the attention of man.

533 of black, red, and yellow fibers, clothes of plaited fibers, and the
292 musicians wear a cuirass made of fana seeds (a sort of bean). The bass player wears a band in the back which reaches to his heels and describes a circle when the musician whirls in going from north to south and from east to west to give the cadence. The other musicians form a circle which the dancers and singers do not enter. Another djo is the So, where the musicians and the singers wear masks of wooden horses, except for two clowns who represent the masculine element in the midst of the crowd of young girls. Lastly, the third djo is the djõ buru (buru, "trumpet"). This is the djo of the slaves; they play the ivory horn and are clothed like the N'ganian, but the bass player represents a cow, and the others are the heifers who respond to the cadence indicated to them by their mother.

E. Literature

538 Bambara literature, entirely oral, is extremely rich. It is the monopoly of the griot who from their earliest days learn the stories, the proverbs, the mottoes associated with each [108] family. They recite very long and very numerous epic songs concerning each great family, accompanying themselves on the harp. Certain parts are recited, others are sung in chorus by the griot and his wife. These stories are at the same time historical narratives of heroes' exploits and the mythical history of a demiurge symbolized by the hero. An infinitely small part of these epic songs has been collected. Some Bambara proverbs and stories have been collected by Moussa Traoré in particular.

545 It is interesting to mention another literary production, one
794 in which the creative inspiration of the artist plays a greater part:
522 these are the narratives of the members of the Kworé brotherhood. The Kworéduga are clowns, or rather commedia dell'arte players. One is a Kworéduga by hereditary transmission or by natural bent. During his initiation in the bush, where he submits to ritual harsh treatment, the initiate learns never to lose his temper, no matter what the circumstances. He is taught a comic language, witty sayings. He is trained to observe men's character closely and to recite stanzas and couplets giving his observations.

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"O fara n fasili-ïn te boli dé ni sétané tjé wa? Nibé boli dé son, i be Sétané son tigné, nka i be sétané bɔ̀gna doron, boli dé, héwa fen min yéra o dé te foufi gnâ.

"O té, djiné ni boli ma-n-kan, boli dé hen, an be fen min yé, o be fen gnâ dérén. Sétané an'o fen olou foula té ké boli yé wa?"

"Does this difference not exist between the boli and satan? If you sacrifice to the boli, you sacrifice to satan, that is certain; but you honor only the demon, and its object is no help to you.

"No, you haven't understood. A genie and a boli are not the same. The boli is bound to what we see; it is useful to us. Satan and his object, both together -- do they not make up the boli?"

Boli dé: An object in which is found the spirit the Negroes call Sétané, "Satan."

776 The gnéna, or djiné, half man and half angel, malicious though it is, can nevertheless do good and grant a direct blessing by performing a good act. But the gnâ, the boli, a fallen angel (méléké sifa do do, " it is a kind of angel"), in revolt against God and, as I stated in my chapter on God, condemned to the tortures of fire, is entirely evil and cannot directly do a good deed (1). It can never-

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1. I challenge the European "Bambara scholars" of Ségou to listen to the two djéli (storytellers /griots/) of Goïn, a small village a short distance from this center. The sacred dances and songs of the boli are their specialty, and they travel over the

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whole circle in the dry season. For example, the master of a Nama will give an account, and the storyteller will take up the refrain, which always ends: "I have told you truly, the Nama can refrain from evil, but it is capable only of evil (a ka fari, a ka djougou ko djougou). It is evil, very evil!"

776 theless refrain from an evil act and thus indirectly grant a blessing to human beings. The words of the formula in the sacrifices to the gnéna and the gnâ seem identical, and yet, when one has understood the inmost feelings of the Bambara soul, one sees all the difference between them. To one as to the other the Negroes say: "Ka dji d'amma (give us water), ka mousoou d'amma (give us wives), ka nafolo d'amma (give us wealth), etc." But while in speaking to the first they actually ask for water, wives, etc., they make an indirect request to the second, so that their words mean: "Do nothing to keep us from having wives," "do nothing to keep us from having water," etc. In expressing himself this way he uses all his cunning, and all his deceit comes to the surface and is revealed. Yes, he really deserves the epithet that neighboring tribes have given him and of which he is proud; it is misi bo, "cow dung," -- dry on the outside but limp and soft inside, so that it is squashed when it is stepped on. His inner feeling when he addresses the boli is this: "O Spirits, evil genii, you are capable only of evil; may your hatred not attack me or those who are dear to me, may it all be for my enemies and those that can harm me!" /130/

2. The Legend of the Boli

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This is a very curious legend, for it makes the boli come from Mecca, the holy city! To understand it better, let us remember in passing that Islam has only made the Bambara more attached to their idols. They have died in order to keep them; they answered the

that she is a girl, that one day she will be a man's plaything, an object for his pleasure. The child would leave smiling and replace her three fingers of rag even as she walked away. At dinner time a big girl would come carrying the gourd of tô, or sorghum gruel, on her head, and on the palm of her right hand, at shoulder height, the platter of dried fish sauce. She would be greeted from as far away as she could be seen and asked for a report on her whole body, and indeed there would be no stopping at "how are your feet" nor even at "how are your breasts." And the girl would answer all these vile questions without getting excited, and when a well-washed hand, ready to be used as a spoon, embraced her or lifted her breasts, she was not shocked; only the opposite would surprise her.

Here and there in the village a giant tree stretches its branches afar, and the old men, lovers of endless palaver, enjoy themselves under its shade. They go there from the early morning to weave cloth, make mats, tan hides, scour goats' horns intended for powerful amulets, etc., and often even /159/ just for the purpose of spending the hours dozing. And in the midst of all these gray, or at least graying, beards, swarms a world of children. Among the old men there are good storytellers /conteur/, who excel in stories of hunting and war that throb with interest -- but why, alas, must they always graft on some salacious incident? Their mouths are full chiefly with stories of adultery and fornication. They will not spare you a single detail, and they will readily go back to the very beginning so as to lack no precision whatever. And the moral of these stories can be reduced to this: "There is nothing in this world comparable to the pleasures of the flesh; let us enjoy marriage and never pass up a chance to obtain this satisfaction."

If the old men are this lewd, is it surprising to hear the young men describe the ugliness of their bestial evenings while they make mats, stretch the hides of drums, or sew a blouse, a cap, or trousers for themselves in the b'lon, or entry hut? They talk constantly of their soungourou, and this term, which should simply mean an unmarried girl, means any woman, married or not, who gives herself to the first comer.

Without any shame they talk and chat about all these vile acts before their little brothers, before children ten and twelve years old,